THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) and (b) According to the available information, the habitats of Sarus cranes in two out of six wetlands in Mainpuri and Etawah districts of Uttar Pradesh have been affected due to draining of wetlands converting these into agricultural fields. The total cost of the project is US $ 194.1 million (Rupees 932 crores approximately).

(c) and (d) The Wilelife Trust of India has filed a Writ Petition No. 3807/ 2002 for stopping the implemen ation of the project. High Court of Allahabad has passed a stay order on 19.3.2002 asking the State Government to stop any developmental activity that adversely affects the natural habitat of Sarus cranes.

Officers under Wildlife Protection Act

3976. SHRI RAMACHANDRA KHUNTIA: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) what are the reasons that the officers of Central Excise, Customs, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, Directorate General of Central Excise Intelligence are not being declared by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, as proper officers under the Wildlife Protection Act (1972), as it may greatly assist in the effors for wildlife conservation; and

(b) whether there is any such proposal before Government at present?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) and (b) The officers of Customs, Central Excise and Revenue Intelligence are empowered to take action against the person indulging the illegal trade in wildlife and its derivatives under the provisions of the Customs Act, 1962. In this background, no proposal for delegation of powers to these organisations under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 has come up for consideration of the Central Government.

Non-wood forest produce in Gujarat

3977. DR. A.K. PATEL: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state whether Government have received any proposal from the Gujarat Government regarding a project for sustainable management of non-wood forest produce?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): No specific project proposal for sustainable management of non-wood forest produce has been received from the Gujarat Government. However,

during the Ninth Five Year Plan, a centrally sponsored scheme of Non-Timber Forest Produce including Medicinal Plants was under implementation in the State with the basic objective of conserving and increasing production of non-timber forest produce including medicinal plants.

Four (4) projects with an outlay of Rs. 764.99 lakhs for treating an area of 4795 ha. were sanctioned against which an amount of Rs. 564.58 lakhs was released. The physical achievement upto December 2001 in 4225 ha.

Protection of Wild Life

3978. SHRI ABANI ROY: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have dissolved a high powered Committee which had been set up last year to suggest ways to preserve and promote wildlife health in the country;

(b) if so, the facts and details thereof;

(c) whether the necessary steps to protect the life of wild animals, tigers in particular, from being poached or illegally hunted, have been found to be inadequate; and

(d) if so, the facts thereof and the steps formulated to implement various recommendations on protection of wild animals?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) and (d) Large number of vacancies at the field level, inadequate mobility and fire arms, lack of expertise in the field of intelligence gathering, investigation and prosecution have been found to be the main bottle-necks in the effetive protection of wildlife particularly, tiger, leopard, elephant and rhino which are in high demand in the clandestine markets across the border. Prime Minister has appealed to all the Chief Ministers to address the aforesaid problems on priority basis. In the recent meeting of the Indian Board for Wild-Life held on 21.1.2002 under the Chairmanship of the Prime Minister, the Wild Life Conservation Strategy 2002 was adopted. The salient features of the strategy are annexed as statement. (*See below*). All State Government have been requested to implement the strategy effectively.